

Witches: Fact, Fiction and Folklore

Witches have appeared in stories, legends, and beliefs for centuries. From ancient times to modern fantasy books, witches have fascinated and frightened people across the world. But who—or what—are witches really? This report explores the history, beliefs, and modern understanding of witches, separating fact from fiction.

What Is a Witch?

A witch is traditionally believed to be a person who uses magic or supernatural powers. In folklore, witches were often thought to cast spells, mix potions, and communicate with spirits. While some people believed witches used their powers for good, others feared they could cause illness, bad luck, or even death.

In many stories, witches are shown as wearing black cloaks, riding broomsticks, and keeping black cats as pets. However, these are mostly fictional ideas that grew from centuries of myth and misunderstanding.

Witches in History

Belief in witches dates back thousands of years. In Ancient Greece and Rome, people believed in wise women who could heal using herbs. In other cultures, shamans or medicine people played a similar role, using rituals and natural remedies.

However, during the late Middle Ages and into the 1600s, fear of witches spread across Europe and parts of America. People believed that witches made deals with the devil and caused harm through dark magic. This led to thousands of innocent people—mainly women—being accused of witchcraft. Many were punished or even killed in witch trials, such as those in Salem, Massachusetts, in 1692.

These events are now seen as tragic examples of how fear and superstition can lead to injustice.

Famous Witches in Literature

Witches are common characters in books, plays, and films. William Shakespeare's *Macbeth* includes three witches who predict the future and influence the main character's fate. In *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* by C.S. Lewis, the White Witch is a powerful and cruel villain who casts Narnia into eternal winter.

Modern stories often show witches in a more positive light. For example, in J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series, witches and wizards are magical people who attend school, make friends, and battle evil. These stories explore both the fun and the danger of magic.

Modern Witches and Wicca

Today, some people identify as real-life witches, often practising a peaceful religion called **Wicca**. Wiccans believe in nature, balance, and using positive energy. They

celebrate the changing seasons, honour the earth, and often work with herbs and crystals.

Modern witches do not match the frightening image from fairy tales. Instead, many are part of spiritual communities that encourage kindness, respect, and connection to the natural world.

Common Myths About Witches

Many of the ideas people once believed about witches are now seen as myths. For example:

- Witches **do not** fly on broomsticks.
- Witches **do not** have green skin or warts.
- Witches **do not** cast evil spells to harm others.
- Not all witches are women—historically and today, men can be witches too.

It is important to think critically about what we see in films or read in stories. While fictional witches can be exciting or scary, they are very different from real people who were once accused—or who now practise peaceful beliefs.

Conclusion

Witches have been misunderstood for centuries. From wise women and herbal healers to the magical characters in stories, witches have taken many forms. Whether feared, celebrated, or imagined, witches continue to capture our imagination. By learning the truth behind the myths, we gain a clearer understanding of the past—and a greater respect for the truth hidden behind the tales.

1) Find and copy a phrase, in the first paragraph, which suggests that the author does believe that there is some truth to witches. (1 mark)

2) What is the author's definition of a witch? (1 mark)

3) Look at the section Witches in History. When does the author believe the fear of witches began? (1 mark)

4) Look at the section Witches in History. Find and copy one word which means being blamed for something. (1 mark)

5) In which American state did the witch trials take place in 1692? (1 mark)

6) Is the witch in The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe a nice character? How do you know? (2 marks)

7) How do Wiccans practice their religion? Find 2 ways (2 marks)

8) How do modern witches differ from the traditional image? (1 mark)

9) Find and copy three things which are not true about witches (3 marks)

10) Why does the author describe witches as 'misunderstood'? (2 marks)

11) Does the author believe that it is important that we learn about witches? How do you know? (2 marks)
